2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

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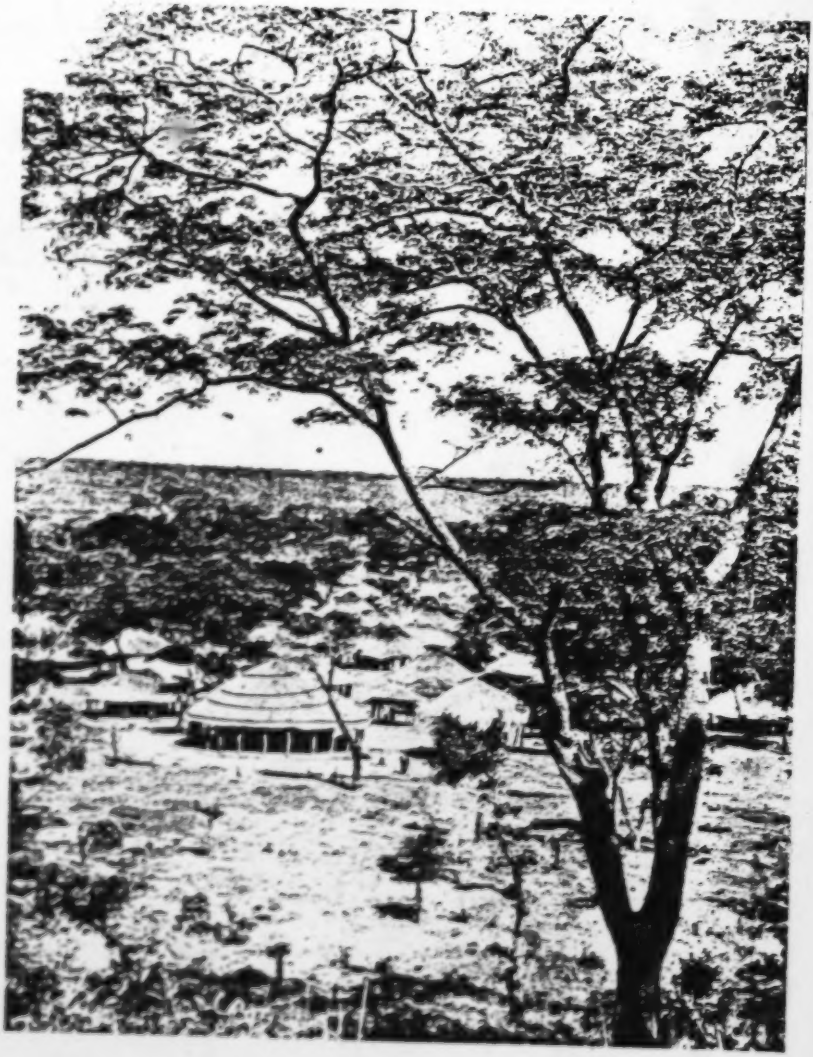

Bemba village—Nkula, 1930.
(Ethnographer's tent on left.)

[frontispiece]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
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Winnowing the grain.

Pounding the millet.

[facing p. 100]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
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CHAPTER VI

THE ROUTINE OF HOUSECRAFT

Housework.

512 COOKING is an occupation which has to be fitted into a seasonal as well as a daily routine. The Bemba housewife has to cleanse and tidy her hut and look after her children, as well as prepare the daily meals with all the accessory activities which this implies. Over and above, she is responsible, in this particular tribe, for more than half of the agricultural work of the year, and therefore the time she has free for cooking varies from month to month.

342 The actual housework of the Bemba woman does not fill so large a proportion of her time as that of a European woman. She has, to begin with, fewer material possessions and a smaller house.[1] Her hut is usually round without windows, and closed with a single door. On one side of the door is the fire-place with its three fire-stands and the drying rack above it. Opposite is the bed, a reed mat stretched across a tiny platform raised off the floor. Besides this, she has cooking vessels stacked round the wall, a blanket and one or two garments, and her husband's axe, spear, or bow. The hut itself is not 'lived in' in our sense of the word, except in wet weather. Natives sit and talk on their verandas or in the men's shelters and usually dance outside. The Bemba's house is therefore a kitchen and a bedroom only, and on special occasions a place where beer drinks are held. To tidy and clean an African hut is therefore a simple job compared with the work of a European woman in charge of a three- or four-roomed house, and living possibly in the smoky atmosphere of a town.

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356 Nevertheless, some housework has to be done. The interior of a Bemba hut looks dirty at first glance. The smoke of the fire blackens the rafters of the roof. Dust and fragments accumulate on the floor, which has not the hard surface of the cow-dung cement used, for instance, in Nyasaland. There are no shelves or

[1] From measurements taken of 11 huts the average wall height was 6 ft. 1 in. and the diameter 14 ft. 2 in. The biggest hut measured, that of a chief, had a wall height of 8 ft. 4 in. and a diameter of 17 ft. The more modern type of hut built in this area is rectangular.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

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Fetching water for the kitchen.

First steps in cooking.

Grinding the daily flour.

[facing p. 106]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

602 621 177 a man and his wife and his mother, &c. In these circumstances the unit of economic co-operation is smaller than formerly; the families detach themselves more easily and go to join other villages according to their fancy; and the authority of the headman is lessened, since his kinship with them is slighter than in the old-fashioned village.

602 621 A typical kinship unit of the old-fashioned type is described in greater detail in Chap. X. An analysis of the social structure of a number of such communities can be found in Appendix, Table E, for those who have a special interest in kinship problems. The economic system based on these types of local grouping must now be described.

The Village Scene.

621 The huts in a Bemba village fill a circular or oval space in the middle of a ring of garden-beds. Those on the outskirts are built side by side, anything from 3 to 20 ft. apart, each with its door facing to the centre. The huts in the centre are scattered without much determinate plan.[1] When building a village the older men take the good sites such as small eminences or ant-hills, and their huts tend to be larger and better built. Their sons-in-law either build close to them, or else, if there are sufficient young men to form a group of their own, these construct their huts round the open dancing space (*ulubansa*) at one side of the village. The granaries of house-holders living on the outskirts stand in a ring on the garden-beds, the others are placed near their [345] owners' huts. The men's club-houses (*nsaka*) are nothing more than open shelters, roofs supported on uprights, and these are usually built at each end of the village.

342 [177] 513 Huts are circular or square in shape,[2] with broad verandas in the case of men of substance. A man and his wife sleep in each hut, but any child over two or three (the weaning age) is sent to sleep with its grandparents, and in an old couple's house it is common to find five or six small children stretched in a row on a mat in front of the fire. Young girls usually sleep in the hut of a young married woman whose husband is temporarily away, or with a widowed woman. They often change their sleeping-

[1] In the larger chiefs' villages the huts are divided into *icitente* (*ifitente*), separate areas under the control of a headman.

[2] The square huts are the more modern variety.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

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place each night. Boys build houses for themselves in twos or threes.

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Life is lived almost entirely in the open, on the verandas or on the ground in front of each house, and the doors are rarely closed by day. Each villager can see or hear most of what goes on next door in a community of an average size, i.e. of 30 to 50 huts. The Bemba even prepare their food as far as possible in the open—one of the most important sanctions for their particular system of distribution, as we shall see. Strolling through the village late in the afternoon the European will notice little groups of women and girls working together at different tasks. Two women may be grinding side by side at one grindstone, while others have carried their mortars to the door of the same hut and are pounding their grain in unison. On another veranda a group of young girls are shelling nuts, while the leaves for a vegetable stew are being cut and stalked by an older householder. Two grandmothers may be squatting by the fire stirring the porridge, while babies from various households are scrambling in and out of the hut on the lookout for tit-bits. Little girls between 8 and 12 belonging to different families come into the room to beg for something to cook on their own fires, and retire, laughing and talking, to miniature fire-places at the back of the veranda. Young matrons come in and out to borrow pots or a pinch of snuff—there is, in short a constant coming and going of women from hut to hut, while the boys and men of the different families are somewhere in the distance. Even the head of a household, returning from work, will not linger in his hut while cooking is in progress, but will stoop to enter the door, throw his spear silently on the bed and go off to wait elsewhere.

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The division of the porridge each evening is an impressive sight in a big hut, and shows at a first glance that the catering far exceeds the limits of a single household. The housewife, probably an old woman, squats on the floor in front of the fire with four or five small eating-baskets beside her. From the great steaming pot on the hearth she takes lump after lump of porridge on the stirrer and slowly, appraisingly, scrapes off the right amount into each receptacle. A ring of younger women and children watch the spoon intently as it hovers a moment above each basket, and later descends to smooth each portion of *ubwali* into round balls. Next the relish is divided into a motley collection

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

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Heads of cooking-teams. Four grandmothers ruling over 'big houses'. Women and children eat together.

[facing p. 192]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

361 [342 221] the chief and his followers have to move into temporary grass shelters (*imitanda*) during the tree-cutting and harvest seasons, and commoners will camp near their gardens for as many as four months of the year. The *bakabilo*, or hereditary councillors of the Paramount Chief, are also prevented for politico-religious reasons from moving far afield. Of Citimukulu's 160 villages, 52 were under the rule of hereditary councillors or priests in 1934, and of this latter group I should judge that at least 30 were bound for traditional reasons to remain fixed to one locality. For commoners the choice is much freer, although they have a strong tendency to build within a five-mile radius of their relatives. But I have known them make a village on poor soil because they wanted to live on the motor road, or near to a white man's farm. The people also cultivate exhausted soil in areas near a white settlement like Kasama, where the villages move from site to site, sometimes at a distance of a quarter of a mile or so, in order to be near the town. The fishing villages on the banks of the Chambesi are similarly fixed without special reference to the soil possibilities since in this case the value of the fishing is greater than that of the agricultural produce. At Molema, near some valuable fishing pools in the Chambesi, the ground has been under continuous cultivation, chiefly with cassava, for four generations.[1] Apart from these special cases, it can be said that the majority of headmen build villages in the best soil they can find within an area of five or ten square miles of their last site.

Choice of Garden Sites.

241 242 Having founded his village, the next step for the Bemba is to choose his garden plots. In this case he is looking first and foremost for suitable ground for millet cultivation. He has no other object in mind. To select the most suitable spot for his garden he is guided first by certain general factors such as the presence or absence of plenty of high trees and grasses. He divides the *mpanga* into two main categories—the ordinary woodland (*umutengo*) in which gardens are made, and the tall grass-bush country (*icipya*, plur. *ifipya*) which passes locally into thickets (*amateshi*). The *ifipya* are not cultivated though they may be fertile. They are the haunts of buffalo and elephant and are commonly avoided by native paths. The hunter goes there but it is difficult to find a way

[1] Cf. Chap. XVI, p. 341.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

The Ceremony

881 They also sang again and again a song about the white egret (No. 48) as they surrounded the whitened forms of the girls and danced them back to the village.

As we came near the houses men sitting in the doorways of their huts lowered their eyes ostentatiously as we passed.

We assembled at the initiation hut and began again songs and offerings of respect to the *nacimbusa* in order of precedence. All the relatives in the hut were touched with white clay. The girls were then led to the house of the village headmen who 'spat the blessings of the spirits' on them, (*ukupala amate*).

[302] (This ceremony, literally 'going to whitewash', seemed to be thought rather romantic and interesting by the women. They referred to the girls throughout in an almost sentimental way as English women speak of the beauty of brides on their wedding day. 'We make the girls white. We make them beautiful.' 'We make them white like egrets.' 'Yes, they are white now from the stain of the blood.' 'It is finished now, the thing that was red.')

[783 789] The *ukuya kumpemba* seems to mark a definite stage in the ritual. It is a rite of purification from the menstrual blood and a form of beauty magic. It is followed by the second calling of the blessings of the ancestral spirits.

FIFTEENTH DAY

The shelter and the screen

881 342 Nangoshye and a few helpers went out in the middle of the morning to collect stout logs in the bush. By the early afternoon I found them hard at work setting a grass roof on five strong uprights to form a small shelter of the type commonly found in Bemba villages. The supports and roof were covered with clay and the whole stuck with the inevitable beans, pumpkin seeds, red cam wood and white flour. On top of the roof a stick was frayed out to form a plume, or *ngala*. The whole erection was described as an *nsaka*, or a man's shelter, or an *nchenje*, the special term used for the shelter built by the head army captain in a chief's village. This was a place of protection, a spot where the soldiers gathered together in the evening.

(The symbolism was rather obscure, not only to me, but also apparently to many of the women engaged in making the shelter.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

The Ceremony

It was described as a place of safety, and again as a place to idle about in, (*ukuangala*), or to rest in. One woman said it was to teach the girl that she must no longer sit about in the village square. Her place, as a married woman, was inside the hut. Another referred vaguely to the crest on top of the roof and said it was like the feathered head-dress worn by a *nacimbusa* in the old days. It was a curious example of work done with a great expenditure of effort and apparently little interest in the meaning of the emblem produced.)

In the meantime, other women were at work making a screen about four feet high. It was covered with decorated clay. A small window was made in the wall and in the centre a round lump with a feather stuck in the middle of it.

(Here again, the symbolism was complex. The screen was called the *lubondo*. It was described as the wall of the house the man would build for his bride. The boss in the centre was called the navel and was referred to in a rather sly manner. The navel is always thought of as a rather amusing and slightly obscene part of the body by the Bemba and one woman said in a shamefaced yet slightly defiant manner, 'Yes, it is to teach her to yield herself to her husband—to let him sleep with her when he wants to.')

Whether or not the esoteric significance of these *mbusa* was realized by the company present, the atmosphere in the hut was that of a rather jolly children's Christmas party in England. The girls and their parents and close relatives crowded into the house in the evening and played uproarious games in and around the shelter and the screen. There was dodging behind the screen with a good deal of giggling and shouting, a ring dance round the shelter, and a ball game played with a rolled-up piece of cloth. The company enjoyed themselves and were most impatient of requests to 'explain' what they were doing. 'We are just honouring the past,' said one girl nonchalantly, smiling and poised to catch 'the ball' a fellow was aiming at her.

The games went on till about nine at night. After this, Nangoshye, the *banacisungu* and one or two helpers walked round and round the village beating the chisungu rhythm on the drums until late into the night. She said the drums would let people know how important a ceremony it was.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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They learn to grind the millet and cook at a very early age
(See p. 126)

[facing p. 177]

The fifty or so clans represented in the valley are part of a fairly uniform clan system which extends over the territories inhabited by the Bemba-, Luba- and Lamba-speaking peoples. The *Bena Mumba* (Clay clan) have their *ntulo* at Matanda in the upper valley of the Luapula, those of the *Bakosa* (Millipede clan) and the *Bena Mbushi* (Goat clan) are on the Lualaba; that of the *Bena Mfula* (Rain clan) is in the forest of Ngumbo on Lake Bangweulu. Originally, it is vaguely believed, all came from Kola (Angola?)

The *cikota* or *cisaka* is a segment of the clan, no longer localised, whose members gather to discuss *milandu* cases and to make decisions in matters of inheritance and succession.

Cikolwe ("big cock") is a term used to denote a common ancestor. It can be applied to the head, alive or dead, of a matrilineal descent group of any size, but usually refers to the ancestor or ancestress who broke away from the clan and led his extended family and followers from their clan *ntulo* to the valley.

Clan membership is not rigidly determined; it is usual to belong to one's mother's clan but it is possible to claim membership of any of the clans to which one's grandparents belonged. The descendants of the Lunda of Muata Yamvo remain patrilineal. The Luba from the Lualaba, who joined the Lunda and became Lundaised, were previously matrilineal.

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION AND SETTLEMENT

Villages were originally founded by the immigrant groups under the leadership of *fikolwe* (sing. *cikolwe*) many of whom were women. The nucleus of each group was formed by a single matrilineal descent group, *cikota*. In spite of inter-marriage and increasing spatial mobility, which tend to obliterate the original connection between the territorial and the kinship structure, villages are still identified by outsiders with their founding clans.

Village headmanship remains in the *cikota*. The headman succeeds to the office, the name, the wives, and the insignia (belt and gun or spear) of his predecessor. He has the charge of *nshipa*, the village medicine. A village is divided into wards, *fitente* (sing. *citente*), in which the households of close relatives are grouped together.

Most of the old village sites in the *damboes* of the Luapula tributaries are now derelict. With the coming of the Pax Britannica and the development of cash sales of fish the villages moved closer to the river edge and now extend along the trunk road. New villages recognised by the government must number at least fifteen tax-payers. The average size of villages is 150-200 inhabitants. The capital has a population of 3,000.(1)

Formerly the huts were circular, grass-roofed, woven bamboo structures,(2) scattered amidst cassava plantations.(3) Nowadays the villages are more

1) The capital is usually referred to as Kazembe. It was moved south after the Yeke invasion. The old site is part of the territory settled by the Bemba after they had assisted Kazembe against the Yeke. The new site was previously known as Mwansabombwe.

2) Valdez, II, p.249; Burton, p.46. (3) Livingstone, I, p.248.

342 361 compact, and sun-dried brick is increasingly being used in building. Appendages usually include a raised granary-storehouse, a platform for drying cassava, a kitchen, goat-and-sheep pen and latrine. Fishing camps are of more flimsy construction consisting of wattle-and-daub or grass shelters.

361 621 On the left bank of the Luapula, where the density of the population and its mobility are less, greater concentrations of kinsfolk occur in the villages, which are more isolated and irregularly distributed.

542 945 In polygynous households there is a house for each wife. An open space is left in front of the headman's hut which otherwise does not differ from the others. There are bachelor huts (*itanda*, pl. *amatanda*) for boys but few for girls.

341 722 During the Yeke raids the population was concentrated in some dozen stockaded villages.

361 Village-gardens are occasionally enclosed as a precaution against the bush-pig, especially near Lake Mweru. Each village has its own landing-stage (*cabu*).

621 People are now free to build where they wish and the tendency for houses of kinsfolk to be grouped together is disappearing. As the Watch Tower movement developed separate villages were set up by believers who cultivated and harvested in the fields communally.(1)

INITIATION RITES.

881 Initiation rites were more elaborate for girls than for boys. Girls still undergo *cisungu*, a *rite de passage*, common to the Bemba-speaking peoples but not found among the Luba, which aims at preparing them for their future life and duties as housewives and mothers. The instruction is imparted by the *Banacimbusa*, matrons and midwives.

[304] There are now no initiation ceremonies for boys. Lunda boys were formerly circumcised at 14-16 years of age(2) in a *mushitu* (thicket) in the Nshinda swamp. No parallel operation was performed on girls.

561 The society is not formally differentiated on the basis of age, and there are no indications of the existence of an age-set organisation.

SECRET SOCIETIES

575 Of the secret societies the *Butwa*(3) was open to both sexes. *Bulindu* is described as a women's society.(4) The *Butwa*, believed to have originated among the Twa of Lake Bangweulu and to have been established in the country prior to the arrival of the Bemba-speaking peoples,(5) had lodges "along the entire length of the Luapula as far as Lake Mweru on both the British and the Belgian sides"(6) in 1914. "Nkuba is the recognised

(1) Quick, 1940, p.221.
(2) Burton, p.128.
(3) Campbell, J. 1914.
(4) Crawford, 2, p.129.
(5) According to Campbell. Another version is that it came "with the migratory tribes of the Kazembe's, the Walunda and the Wausi, from the west about 1760." (Gouldsbury and Sheane, 1911, p.260.)
(6) Campbell, op.cit., p.77.